

The Life Story of Yao Ch'ong-seng.

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THE LIFE STORY OF YAO CH'ONG-SENG.

BY MISS S. GARLAND.

[In the following account, given by request to his fellow Christians at Ts'in-chau, Kan-suh, Mr. Yao tells the story of his life. It is here reproduced as nearly as possible in his own words. His story cannot fail to find a sympathetic response in the hearts of believers, especially those who in the hour of sorrow and trial have proved the sufficiency of God's grace. Showing, as it does, some of the difficulties with which Chinese Christians have to contend, we trust its perusal may lead to more earnest prayer on their behalf.]

THERE is one verse of Scripture which through many years has been food to my soul. It is Rom. 8: 28, "All things work together for good to them that love God." Looking back over my life, I can see how true it is.

My father was forty-five years old when I was born. He gave me the name of "Rest," because thus late in life he had obtained a son. Subsequently three more sons were given him. At this time our family was in comfortable circumstances. My father had a prosperous business in Si-ch'uen, and also owned more farm land in our village than was needed for the support of our family. I was able to remain at school till I was eighteen or nineteen years old. Then came times of trouble. The business in Si-ch'uen was ruined and the property lost in the T'ai-p'ing Rebellion. Next came the Mohammedan

Rebellion in Kan-suh, extending, with several intervals of peace, through many years. My father died worn out with trouble and anxiety.

We lost much property, and in 1872 one of our children was taken. One day the alarm was given that the rebels were about to attack our village, and we set out to flee to the fortress on the hills above us. I was leading my old mother and carrying a bag of grain and some other necessary things: my wife was carrying the baby and leading our other child (six years old) by the hand, when we saw a company of mounted rebels swing around a turn in the mountain path. They were coming right down upon us, and we could not run from them; the only thing to do was to jump from the road down a steep bank, and take refuge in the hollow below. This we did. The men saw and cursed us as they passed along the road above but seeing that we were poor folk, they thought it not worth while to waste their time in coming down after us. After they had gone we climbed up another way, and finally reached the fortress. The leap down the bank cost us the life of our baby. Though we could not tell how he had been hurt, he lay moaning in his mother's arms until about midnight and then passed away. The miseries of those bitter, bitter winter flights through ice and snow, often with bleeding feet, over rocky roads and frozen streams; of midnight alarms and long days of suspense and fearfulness; and of weeks of hiding in the dreary hill-top

fortress, from which sallies must be made down into the valleys for food and water—these are all familiar to those who have passed through such rebellions. But I must not dwell on the troubles of those years.

FIRST MEETING WITH A FOREIGNER.

My first meeting with a foreigner was during the famine which followed the Mohammedan Rebellion. I was on my way to Si-ch'uen, and had reached Ts'ao-kioh-p'u. I was drinking tea at an inn, intending to go on further before stopping for the night, when a foreign gentleman arrived and engaged a room at the inn in which I was resting. He had with him a mule-load of wadded jackets, and soon sent for the head man of the place, saying that he had come to distribute these to the needy, and that he wanted them to be given to those only who were really destitute. When this was known, many of those who had clothes took them off and came in with scarcely anything on. I myself saw one boy get possession of two jackets in this way. I was so much interested in this foreigner that I determined to stay all night and see all I could of him. I had heard a great deal of evil about these people from over the seas, but I could not make the stories fit in with the kindness and goodness of this man. Yet, though I secretly admired the man, I had nothing to say to him, and did not hear him preach.

Some years after this I came into Ts'in-chau one day on business, and

while in a friend's shop I found on his table a copy of Mark's Gospel. "What?—a foreign book?" I said, "Wherever did you get it?" "Oh, you can get them easily enough when the foreigner comes along; they are only too glad to give them to people. You wait a bit, and one of them will be along." I sat waiting, and presently my friend said, "There they are—two foreign women—go out and ask them, they will give you books." But this I was ashamed to do, and finally persuading my friend to let me have his copy, I took it home and read it. I was much interested in it, but failed to make much of it, being more struck with John's camel's hair coat than with anything else.

Not very long after this, news was brought us of the death of a son who had been working in his uncle's shop in Lan-chau, and I had to go up to settle his affairs. Sad, indeed, was my heart on this journey. At that time, Suen-ie (the first convert in Ts'in-chau), was also in Lan-chau, having gone there with Mr. Parker to secure a house for the Mission. I asked him why he had taken to following the foreigner. Was not the doctrine of Confucius better than any other? "Why," he said, "the Bible tells us to worship the very *Shang-ti* (God) that Confucius talks about." "You don't mean to say so!" said I. "Ever since I was a boy I have wanted to know who the *Shang-ti* is that we read of in the classics. I asked my teacher at school, but he could not tell. Since then I have

asked priests and necromancers and others, but no one ever could tell me. This *is* something to have learned." Suen-ie gave me some Christian books and asked me to come to service on Sunday. Finally I promised to do so.

FIRST ATTENDANCE AT WORSHIP.

The next Sunday it was very wet and muddy, and I had to walk two miles. However, I had promised, and I was bound to go. My courage failed me when I got to the door. I was so wet and muddy, so shy of seeing the foreigner, and so hazy as to what the worship would be like, I almost turned back; but I finally plucked up courage and went in. There sat three foreign gentlemen and Suen-ie. I was late. Each of the foreigners had a strip of board by his side, about two feet long. Presently Mr. Parker said they would pray, whereupon they all rose, and clap went those boards on the floor. I was out of the door in a moment, not knowing what the boards could be for, unless it was *to beat me!* I afterwards found they were to kneel upon, as the floor was of mud. Suen-ie came out after me. I said, "Why ever did you make me come, and why didn't you tell me what it would be like?" I was persuaded to go again, though, later on. This time Mr. Parker was again leading, and there were present a number of blind and lame beggars who had a dinner given to them. I thought, "Whatever am I coming to? Am I to be classed with these blind and

lame beggars?" However, I sat through the service. The text was, "I am the Resurrection and the Life," and I felt that though I had been classed with beggars, I had heard a truth that I had never heard before. What a wonderful Being He must be who can say, "I am the Resurrection and the Life!" This sank deep into my heart.

Soon after this, however, a friend who knew I was seeking after truth, introduced me to the head priest in one of the Lan-chau temples. This man, a Taoist, took a fancy to me, and was very anxious that I should cut myself off from my wife and family and devote myself to a religious life, taking the vows of a Taoist priest. He told me, as an inducement, how wealthy the temple was to which he belonged; how much land they had under opium, rice, etc. I replied that that was not at all what I wanted. I had a certain amount of land of my own, and if I gave up the secular life for a religious one, it would be to get free from earthly things, to try to find a "still heart." I should want to get to the loneliest possible place. This pleased him more than ever, and at last it was arranged that I should leave my home, and he his temple, and together we would take up our abode on the top of a certain hill which was as lonely a place as could be found. He got me a robe, a hat, a begging bowl, and a rosary, and I left to go home and put my house in order, hoping to return at once to carry out our plan.

GOD UPSET HIS PLANS.

But God had other plans. I arrived home to find our eldest son very ill. For five months we were never without sickness in the home. Through all that long winter, night after night, while watching by the sick one, the New Testament Suen-ie had given me was my constant companion; and over and over the words rang in my heart, "I am the Resurrection and the Life. He that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." I have that book yet: it is worn almost to tatters. Over and over, again and again, I read it, and by the time the way was clear I wanted no more to be a hermit, but I did want to know more of this doctrine. Suen-ie had told me that there was an Old Testament, and had given me a copy of Genesis. I set my heart on getting the whole book.

As soon as I could get into the city, I made enquiries for the Gospel Hall, but was wilfully misdirected. Then I was told that there was no teacher at the Hall, and that I must wait till Mr. Hunt came back from furlough. Every time I went into the city, I asked whether Mr. Hunt had returned. At last one day I was told, "Yes, he passed along the street yesterday." I asked the way, and found the Lower Hall (Ladies' House). The door was ajar. I hesitated at first, not knowing what sort of reception I might get; then I boldly pushed the door wide open and went in. Presently Miss Kinahan appeared and asked what I wanted. I said, "I hear that you

keep Old Testaments ; I want to buy one." Miss Kinahan told me that Mr. Hunt had returned, and that I had better go up and see him. I found Mr. Hunt and got the book I wanted. He asked me to sit down and drink tea, and invited me to come to service on Sunday. How glad I was ! The fever within me was suddenly cooled. I did not know then to say, "Thank the Lord," but if it were now, I should say it many times.

CONSIDERED INSANE.

From that time I attended service on Sunday and read diligently the Old and New Testaments. My family thought I was bewitched. Mother would scold me at night for burning so much oil. Then I would put up something to screen the lamp, and she would think it all right. Bye and bye she would awake again to find the light still burning. "That imp reading still !" she would cry. "He's bent on emptying that lamp ;" and I would have to give in. But the book would go with me to the field next day, and breakfast time (11 a.m.) would likely enough find me in some hollow or gully, reading.*

After attending service for some time, I heard from Liu Teng (Mr.

* Mrs. Yao has often referred to this time and to their distress at his supposed insanity. What uncanny power could have taken possession of him to make him sit out in the snow hour after hour, reading by moonlight when there was no oil in the house ? And what could make him walk twenty-seven miles to and from the city every seventh day when he took nothing to sell, and bought nothing to bring back ? At this time he seems to have said little at home about the Truth.

Hunt's servant) that a man was wanted to carry a load of things to the Gospel Hall in Feng-siang. I at once offered to undertake the trip. I had seen the foreigners residing at Lan-chau and Ts'in-chau, as well as the one who gave away the garments, and I wanted to know whether those at Feng-siang were the same. I found they were, and was more convinced than ever that, as these men were so different to my own countrymen, the doctrine they brought must be something surpassing man's thoughts and ideas.

A SEVERE TEST.

The end of that year was, of course, a testing time. A few days before the close of the year I went to the city to buy some things, and came back without candles, paper money, or incense for ancestral worship. My old mother was terribly upset, and herself procured these articles through a neighbor. New Year's eve came, and with it the struggle. I sat on the edge of the brick bed reading my Bible. "And you mean to say that the ancestors of this house are not to have offerings to-night?" said my mother. "I do," said I. "The offerings shall be made!" she cried; "if you will not do it, Ts'ang-wa (my eldest son) shall." "No, he shall not," I replied. Poor old mother, she was very angry, and ordered Ts'ang-wa to burn the incense and paper at once. He would have liked to obey her, but was afraid to do so, and so cried instead, finally appealing to his

mother, as to what he should do. She replied: "The books your father has say it is wrong to worship ancestors. Let us try it this time. If they (the departed spirits) want the offerings and come for them, we can make it up by giving them extra." Outside in the village crackers were sounding, and everyone was astir—our house alone was now dark and quiet. Soon other members of our family and clan came in to make the usual bows to the ancestors of our branch of the family. "What?" they cried, "no one astir? whatever does it mean?" "Oh!" wailed my mother from the window, "this family has no descendants; there is no one to present offerings." After a while they went off, muttering, "The devil! What trouble he will bring upon himself!" From that time the opposition in the village was very strong, and my mother was irreconcilable.

BECOMES A SOUL-WINNER.

In course of time I was baptized, and took the name of Ch'ong-seng (*i.e.*, Born Again). After a time Mr. Hunt asked me to teach a boys' school which he was about to open, and I consented and taught there for some time. I was much concerned about my mother. She was old and might pass away at any time, and was still so opposed to the Truth. I spoke to Mr. Hunt about her, asking him to pray specially for her. He told me to ask her to come and stay a while in the city, hoping that the ladies might be able to win her. I persuaded her to

come. At one of the first meetings she attended, those who desired baptism were asked to give in their names. What was my surprise when I heard my mother give in hers! Verily, verily, the Bible is true, I thought; it says, "Say to this mountain, move from here to there, and it shall be done," and here is my mountain moved at one stroke. Truly God's grace is great. P'u-ts'ang (a son, aged fourteen) was baptized about the same time as his grandmother.

In about two years my mother passed peacefully away. Mr. Hunt and Suen-ie came out to the funeral. My son, Ts'ang-wa, was away from home at the time of his grandmother's death. When he came home, my eldest brother, who had been present all through the service in the house, and also at the grave, told Ts'ang-wa that he, with his own eyes, saw Mr. Hunt take out my mother's eyes, and that he only refrained from taking out her heart also when I knelt and, weeping, besought him not to do so. After hearing this story, Ts'ang-wa came in and threw himself on the brick bed weeping like a child. It was a long while before my wife could find out what was the matter. Then she sent him to another relative who lived in a village some distance away, and who had also been present at the funeral. Happily he told the truth. If he had not done so, things would have gone hard with us. As it was, the story was believed by not a few.

Not long after this, my younger brother came down from Lan-chau to

be married at our house. I found he had consulted the geomancers, and had chosen a lucky day for the ceremony. I said we would choose another day, as the Lord's disciples did not believe in lucky or unlucky days. This he would not agree to, so I said that in that case, neither my wife nor I would take any part in the celebration. There was a great outcry at this, as the women folk said they could not possibly do without my wife to manage affairs. My wife also said that she did not see that it mattered, and refused to go to the city with me. I said, "You will go, if I carry you there," and went to saddle the donkey for her. When I came back, I found the door and window locked and barred. It did not take long to break open the window, but what a wailing there was! My wife was soon on the donkey, but the others wept as though they were escorting a funeral. Outside the village we met a near relative, who took the trouble to climb a hill in order to avoid speaking to me. I felt very down-hearted as I walked along that day; my nearest relative did not distinguish between my back and my face, and even my wife was against me.*

SORROW UPON SORROW.

The year before Mr. Hunt went on his second furlough, sickness again came to our home. P'u-ts'ang (then

* This seems to have been the only time that Mrs. Yao opposed her husband, and she may almost be excused for doing so, for he was certainly carrying his principles to extremes. Before very long she, too, was baptized.

eighteen) was taken ill in the city, and after a while we moved him into the country. Though he rallied for a time, the improvement did not last, and after some months of great weakness, he passed away, telling us not to grieve, as he was sure the Lord was going to prepare a wide, wide place for us in heaven, where as a family we might live together. Most earnestly he urged his brothers to decide to follow Christ, and to join him in the Home above. God's Word was His comfort during his illness, and when too weak to hold a book he would have it propped up by a pillow where he could see it. "When thou passest through the waters," and other verses from Isaiah were great favorites. He was uneasy if the book containing these verses was taken away, and died with it by his pillow.

After P'u-ts'ang's death, San-ts'ang (aged twenty) wished to be baptized, and told several people that as soon as he was baptized he would follow his brother. Mr. Wang, who lived next to the street chapel in this city, heard him say this, and urged me on no account to allow him to be baptized, as he was sure he meant to commit suicide after it was over. I knew San-ts'ang better than that, and just before Mr. Hunt left for England, he baptized my second son, and my heart was glad, for one more of my family was now on the Lord's side. Very soon, however, we found that Sants'ang was far from well, and slowly but steadily he grew worse.

Then, about New Year time, I heard that my second brother, who was in business in Lan-chau, was seriously ill. I sent to have him brought home. I wanted above everything that he should learn to trust Jesus, whatever came. He was brought down, arrived at our home in the country one evening, and passed away next morning. This was one of my greatest sorrows. I have hope for my boys; I shall meet them again; but my brother died without hope, and I, being in the city, did not even see him.

Meanwhile, San-ts'ang grew weaker, and in the 5th moon he too passed away, and another coffin had to be carried out to our village. As it passed along our street, the neighbors came and burned paper at their doors to ward off the evil influences which they thought surrounded me and my home. I was not allowed to bury my son in our family graveyard, and made an arrangement with my eldest brother to exchange a good piece of land for an inferior piece near to my mother's grave, and there I buried my dead. Afterwards my brother wanted the land back, and threatened to dig up the corpse.

FAITHFUL UNDER TRIAL.

Sorrow upon sorrow came to us. Yu-ts'ang (an orphan nephew, almost like a son), and Sui-ts'ang (youngest son) were both very ill. Ere long Yu-ts'ang died, and it appeared as though Sui-ts'ang could not possibly live. It seemed indeed as if a curse were upon us. Men said I was destroying my

family, and that I would rather sacrifice my family than give up my foolish desire to follow the foreigner. My deepest desire had been that God should be glorified in me, and yet it seemed that I was bringing nothing but reproach upon His Name. Men pointed at me and said, "That's what a man gets by believing the foreign doctrine." This grieved me more than anything else.

COMFORTED THROUGH GOD'S WORD.

But I must tell you of the Word which was the very stay of my soul during all this time. It is in Hebrews 12: 5-11, "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons," etc. Every time I read or thought of this passage, it seemed as if the Lord said, as He did to His disciples the night in which he was betrayed, "Take and eat this," and I did and was comforted. Let those who are tried take comfort; not many, perhaps, meet with trials like mine, but the Lord gives grace to all in time of need. His ways with men are never uneven.

Here let us go back again to that great truth of first and last importance, "I am the Resurrection and the Life." What hope it gives us! The night before Sui-ts'ang died, again and again I heard him repeat—in his sleep it seemed—a part of Acts 2: 26, "My flesh also shall rest in hope." We were then still hoping that he might recover, but next day he passed away in peace. Truly God is good to me. He has given me hope concerning my

sons. The night before P'u-ts'ang died, I could see the end was drawing near. His mother was sleeping, worn out with much watching. I took my Bible in my hand and lay down on the brick bed by his side and said, "P'u-ts'ang, how do you feel now?" "I don't feel anything," he said. "Oh, my boy," said I, "can't you tell me where you are? Think of some illustration from the Bible; where are you?" "I'm like the children of Israel crossing the Red Sea and the Jordan," he replied. "Right, my son, that is just what I have been thinking; but when the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea they had a leader, they trusted Moses. What is your trust in crossing?" "I trust the precious blood of Christ," he said. "Enough, enough, my boy!" I cried. "Cross over quickly, quickly—all is well." Next day he passed peacefully away.

I would like to mention one other verse that has given me strength in times of darkness. Like the stone David used to kill Goliath, it is good for driving back the Enemy. You will find it in John 16: 33, "In the world you shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

Now I would like to ask you to pray for me, that I may be more faithful and more used of God than in the past. I do so want to bring glory to Him. Pray, too, for my home and village.

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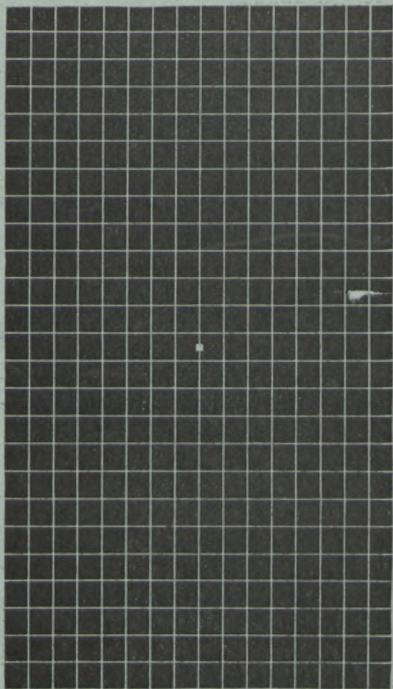
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“Jesus Christ came into the world
to save sinners.”



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“Go ye into all the world and
preach the Gospel to every
creature.”